

Soft Hands, Hard Power: Sponging off the empire of leisure (Virgil, *Georgics* 4)*

TOM GEUE

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to jumpstart the politico-historicist scholarship on Virgil's Georgics in the direction of Marxist criticism. I argue that the Georgics should be understood less as a battle site for intra-elite power struggles or civil strife, more as an ideological stomping ground to work out, and dig in, the particular relationships of slavery and imperialism disfiguring the Roman world in 29 B.C.E. After a brief analysis of the dynamics of labor in books 1-3, I train on a close reading of book 4, which sees the bees (et al.) as crucial to the new dominant logic of compelling others (whether slaves or provincial subjects) to produce and give up the fruits of their labour – all for the leisured enjoyment of the upper crust.

Keywords: Virgil; *Georgics*; labor; Marxist criticism; slavery; imperialism; historicism; bees; Egypt; addressee

‘For half-way up the walls of the entrance hall, as I must have noticed, there were stone escutcheons bearing symbolic sheaves of corn, crossed hammers, winged wheels and so on, with the heraldic motif of the beehive standing not, as one might at first think, for nature made serviceable to mankind, or even industrious labour as a social good, but symbolizing the principle of capital accumulation.’ Sebald, 2002: 13

‘According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.’ Benjamin, 1970: 256

Virgil's *Georgics* have suffered too much and not enough. Around the turn of

the twenty-first century, this poem, like many of its triumviral/Augustan poetry (or even Latin literature) cousins, was subjected to its fair share of impoverished historicism.¹ By impoverished, I mean that the ‘context’ slapped upon it was primarily that of the elite power struggles dogging the inauguration of the ‘age’; a version, that is, of the attention-seeking Augustan question (*just* achingly short of the moment ‘Augustan’ becomes truly kosher terminology).² This straitened understanding of ‘context’ will always be a big part of what we mean when we Latinists say or think we are doing historicism.³ But the polemic purpose of this article is to derail the political historicism of the *Georgics* onto a less beaten critical

* This article grew (and grew) from the cursed blessing of having to teach Roman history for the first time, when I had very little idea what that might mean. I thank Neville Morley especially for sharing his lecture slides and course plans – and subtly interleaving some ideas about imperialism in the same folder. Early thoughts back in 2015/16 went to audiences in Bristol, Oxford and the San Francisco SCS: big thanks for the feedback. Since then, readers and responses to parts and wholes, often sceptical, always confused, sometimes enthused, in legion: I thank in particular Rebecca Armstrong, Emma Buckley, Martin Deveck, Elena Giusti, John Henderson, Jason König, Adam Lecznar, Fiachra Mac Góráin, Roger Rees, Peter Rose, Martin Stöckinger and Bobby Xinyue. The editor and anonymous readers for *JRS* pushed me harder and thickened the rigour. Without a certain person (Miroslav Sandev) and a certain institution (King’s College, Cambridge) in my life, the politics behind this article may not have crystallised – so thanks to them both. Finally: this one’s for the bees.

¹ The brawl between formalism and historicism rages on productively: see Hinds 2010: 370-1.

² For the *Georgics* as a weapon in the consolidating Octavianic faction post civil war, see Morgan 1999; cf. Thibodeau 2011: 77-8. Nappa 2005 reads the poem as direct ‘protreptic’ to Octavian. For *Georgics* 4, my focal point, this tic has surfaced in reading the warring bee kings as Antony and Octavian (Nadeau 1984: 77), or identifying Aristaeus as Octavianic statesman (Morgan 1999: 93; Mynors resists the identification *ad* 4.375; cf. Rutherford 2008: 92), or Virgil as the Orphic collateral damage (for the Aristaeus/Orpheus binary, see e.g. Conte 1986: 130-40; Perkell 1989: 168-9; Perkell 1978: 216-7; Hardie 1998: 47-8; for Aristaeus/Orpheus as a political/refusenik binary, see Morgan 1999: 169-70; for its deconstruction, see Batstone 1997: 127.)

³ Context is crucial to the usual literary/formalist critiques of historicism, i.e. the charge that marginal contexts can be imported dishonestly as central keys: see Thomas 1991: 217-18 on Galinsky 1988 and Habinek 1990; cf. Feeney 2002: 180. Hinds 2010: 383 is excellent on the necessarily restricted versions of ‘context’ recycled in classics.

track, something altogether more exposed to the volcanic forces of slavery and imperialism⁴ boiling – consciously or unconsciously – in and under this violent poem.⁵ I want to bring to bear a mode of close reading which takes stock of the well-documented bumps, paradoxes, gaps and formal tensions of the text not as cognitive challenges, or planted inconsistencies, or the divine bard's sublime transcendence of viewpoint, but as spasmodic flinches of a society predicated on the rawest, most brutal coercion imaginable.

If the critical traditions which tend to celebrate ambivalence⁶ or 'multivalence'⁷ for their own sake have something to do with the default liberalism of the modern academy, this article will take its lift-off thrust from another literary politics: Marxist, or at least Marxish, criticism. The key insight of this broad church for our purposes is the determining (yet complex) relationship⁸ between socioeconomic life and artistic production (or base and superstructure, in older-fashioned Marxist parlance). My approach will be especially tinted by Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*, a form of Marxist ideology critique which treats the text as a kind of social and psychoanalytic subject, the glitches and silences of which reveal its dark political unconscious.⁹ In the *Georgics*, for example, this approach helps us understand the 'repression' wiping slaves from direct mention as deeply related to the material repression of slaves in reality.¹⁰

⁴ The two contexts are obviously linked: imperialist wars brought slaves home (Joshel 2010: 75; Hopkins 1978). Leigh 2016: 411 also links slavery and imperialism as his contextual frames (cf. his alternative title, 429).

⁵ Cf. Hopkins 1993: 5: 'The hostility of Roman slave-owners to their slaves, and of slaves to their owners, lay just below the surface of Roman civilisation like an unexploded volcano.'

⁶ A key word for turn-of-the-millennium Virgilian scholarship, bound up with the optimist/pessimist debate: see Volk 2008: 4, and n. 5. Paradigmatic 'ambivalent' *Georgics* critics would be Jasper Griffin (1979) and Richard Thomas (1988).

⁷ Certain recent work on Virgil prefers this latter over the former: e.g. Reed 2007: 3.

⁸ 'Determining' is not the same as determinism: see Williams 1980: 31-2; cf. Eagleton 1976: 9.

⁹ Macherey 2006 (for such a 'glitch', cf. my point on *aspiciunt* below).

¹⁰ Both forms of repression in some ways characterise the master-slave relationship: cf. Hopkins 1993: 23.

Closer to home, I shall also take cues from a growing ‘tradition’ within Latin literary studies. This trickle minority of scholars usually self-brands as ‘cultural materialist’. They may not be legion, but they are there. Beyond the *Georgics*, scholars such as Habinek and Leigh have tended the flame of a Marxish commitment to squaring textual ideology with material oppression.¹¹ Within *Georgics* scholarship, the tradition does not quite dare speak its name, but it can nevertheless be extracted with a little active digging.¹² Both Reay and Thibodeau (each following in Fitzgerald’s footsteps)¹³ have written brilliantly on how slavery is crowded out of the poem by an elite ideology (or, as Thibodeau more cutely puts it, ‘fantasy’)¹⁴ that they are the ones doing the work as soon as they order the work to be done.¹⁵ The addressee of the poem flits between absentee landowner and on-the-job slave bailiff, only occasionally letting into view (and then only implicitly) the infrastructure of underlings bearing the lion’s share of contemporary villa agriculture;¹⁶ the addictive concept of slave as bodily prosthesis meant the rich Roman could easily slip into deceiving himself that he was the brawn of the operation, just because he was its brains (sometimes not even that).¹⁷ But what is lost from Thibodeau’s account, and what is blanched out in the slightly deodorised concept of an elite ‘fantasy’, is how these fictions and substitutions do the work of violence on an ideological plane. By contrast, a ‘Marxish’ close reading helps us redirect our consciousness to the true

¹¹ Perhaps my closest ancestor in this article, Habinek 1998, lays claim to the cultural materialist tradition of Raymond Williams (5); his theoretical allegiance is (small-c) catholic (7-8), though Marxism gets an explicit mention (8). Leigh 2016 (also opening with Williams) prefers to self-identify as cultural materialist. On the Greek side, see Rose 1992, 2012; Brown 2016.

¹² Lambert 1988, as far as I can tell the only avowedly Marxish crack at a small section of the *Georgics*, reads *Georgics* 4.153-96 as ideological in the narrow sense of ‘Augustan ideology’; his definition of Marxist literary criticism is indistinguishable from new historicism (59).

¹³ Fitzgerald 1996.

¹⁴ Thibodeau 2011: 38; Fitzgerald 1996 also uses the term (389, 391, 393-4)

¹⁵ Fitzgerald 1996: 394-5.

¹⁶ The question of ‘what sort of farm’ is at play in the *Georgics* is a difficult one. I still find Spurr 2008: 28 most convincing (Virgil has eyes mainly, but not only, on villa agriculture).

¹⁷ On the slave as ‘prosthesis’ see Reay 2003: 20, Habinek 2011: 121.

Virgilian ‘cost of power’:¹⁸ the victims of an economic system where many are forced to work for few, while those few do not have to work at all.

This article, then, will build on work which confronts head-on a stumbling block of *Georgics* criticism: the question of why slavery is elided out of the poem’s field of vision.¹⁹ But I shall try to lurch us forward in two ways. Firstly, the economic logic of slavery has to be linked to that of imperialism: both these spheres are bundled by the bare common denominator of compelling humans to produce wealth only to have it extracted from them, and then transferred to the compellers.²⁰ It is important to remember that the ultimate lubricant for these logics was violence or its threat.²¹

Secondly, and more local to the *Georgics*, I want to show how this economic relationship – namely of stark oppression and exploitation – actually develops over the course of the poem; indeed, the poem can be seen as a story of how the Roman elite got to the point of *not* having to get their hands dirty. Reay and Thibodeau tend to treat the ‘fantasies’ (in my view sublimated power relations) of the poem as essentially static: the absentee landowner daydreams himself in and out of the figure of an old-school smallholder (or vice versa) all the way through. By contrast, I want to show how the *Georgics* tells, reaffirms, indeed trumpets the story of Virgil and posh reader/addressee moving from hard grind to slacking off; to a world where the first and second person of the poem can afford to luxuriate in leisure, precisely (and only) because their labour is now lumped onto third persons. Those third persons are the Roman equivalent of the third world: at home on the range, they are the enforced

¹⁸ Bishop 1988.

¹⁹ See Spurr 2008: 31, Volk 2002: 128; Fitzgerald 1996: 389; on the poem’s other ideological omissions, see Thibodeau 2011: 5. Thibodeau 2011: 45 also rightly points to the oblique snippets of slave. The problem of slave visibility transcends the *Georgics* (see Joshel 2010: 191).

The question of a text’s blind spots and absences is crucial to Marxist criticism: see Macherey 2006; cf. Leigh 2016, 407.

²⁰ Imperialism was often understood as a master-slave relationship via metaphor too: see Lavan 2013.

²¹ Cf. Joshel 2010: 74-5, 191; on violence as connection between slavery and imperialism, cf. Bradley 2010: 630-1. Cf. Hopkins 1993: 5, 15.

migrants the Roman elite (had) yanked around as their rightful property; abroad, the working populations those same governing ‘landlords’ wrung out for all the taxes they were worth.

These basic outlines of violent domination may be displaced, or mediated into different forms: farmer over earth;²² trainer over animal; teacher over student; Aristaeus over Proteus; driver over chariot; sailor over ship; ploughman over plough.²³ Even, as we shall see, beekeeper over bees. While some of these regimes may seem labile during the poem, I shall argue that book 4 dramatises their emphatic codification into natural law. To the Roman elite, at this point in history, the major affective frame was not *just* the trauma of civil war,²⁴ but the giddy thrill of seeing the globe as a gang chained to work for you. *You*, the elite Roman subject, are on top of the world; and the *Georgics* will be the triumphal poem of how you got there, pina colada in soft hands.

I THE HARD LABOUR OF DIDAXIS: BOOKS 1-3

My focus for this grand arc from labour to leisure will be book 4, the most exceptional and, not coincidentally, least ‘didactic’ part of the poem. But first we must perform the legwork on books 1-3. I would like to start by briefly unpacking the poem’s didactic form and tethering it to social relationships.²⁵ Or asking, as Reay once put it, ‘why didactic?’²⁶ My answer to this is that didactic contains within it a radical asymmetry of authority between teacher and student, and a crude boot-camp model of command and execute. The genre’s flagship speech-act of the *order* – although it ranges in degree of violence, from out-and-out imperative, to ‘exhortative’

²² See e.g. Thibodeau 2011: 179-82; Fitzgerald 1996: 394-5.

²³ The ubiquitous military metaphors smuggle in constant violence: see Batstone 1997: 136. On the plough and chariot as georgic symbols of order, see Wilhelm 1982.

²⁴ The claim is ubiquitous in scholarship on the period (e.g. Morgan 1999: 125-6).

²⁵ An abiding question of Marxist criticism: see e.g. Jameson 1971; Eagleton 1976: 20-36; see now Levine 2015.

²⁶ Reay 2003: 38.

subjunctive, to more neutral third person description²⁷ – has a degree of *compulsion* built in.²⁸ The violence often escalates through a patronising characterisation of the addressee as a *mega nepios*.²⁹ True, that violence is not always floating on the surface of the *Georgics*. But I would suggest that the didactic form’s advantage is that its conditions of speech can be broken, undone, transcended, set free. Virgil gets going by imposing a lot of work directly onto his captive second person audience; but as the poem’s unequal civilisation evolves into the fully-automated-luxury slave empire of book 4, the second person is tasked less with the daily grind.³⁰ We move from DIY hands-on, to hands-off managerial mode. Didactic is the ideal form in which to tell this story, because it allows a power differential between two parties (*I* and *you*) to be resolved, reconstituted, and foisted onto a third (*them*).³¹

Labor is a touchstone (or grindstone) of the *Georgics*’ universe; an existential state forced on men by the negative boons of the age of Jupiter.³² In the earlier books, work is distributed fairly evenly across second and third persons. We are either the recipients of the command or the narratees of the didactic plot. There is slippage and continuity between first, second and third person; we are all in it together.³³ Most of the time, there is plenty of work to get on with. The teacher naturally gravitates

²⁷ See Gibson 1998; cf. Volk 2002: 123-4. The mixing of these modes partly accounts for why the addressee question is such a staple in *Georgics* scholarship (Gibson 1998: 90).

²⁸ Cf. also Moretti 2013: 57 on literary forms as the ‘abstracts of social relationships’. For the relative degrees of ‘binding’ or ‘optional’ on the imperatival spectrum, see Gibson 1998: 92-6 (and n. 51 below).

²⁹ See Schiesaro *et al.* 1994.

³⁰ For the poem’s plotting of civilisational ‘progress’ alongside setback, and Virgil’s complex cultural history, see Hardie 1998: 36-9, 49; for parallel literary/generic progress, see Farrell 1991; Thibodeau 2011: 10. In some senses, Virgil already bucks the didactic verse trend in preferring the descriptive third person indicative to the more direct imperative or subjunctive (Gibson 1998: 88) – but book 4 upsets the balance in a spectacular fashion.

³¹ Thibodeau 2011: 48 thinks there must be distance between elite reader and second person, on account of aristocratic distaste for work; but this fails to spot the trail from occupation to retirement.

³² Thomas 1986: 17 (and *passim*); Jenkyns 1993.

³³ Cf. Rutherford 2008: 86.

towards tasks that require a lot of work, because that is where the fruits of his own didactic labour can be most usefully applied. The task of viticulture, for example, is little more than *labor* upon *labor* (the word appears three times in a particularly intense patch of vine maintenance, 397, 401, 412), split across the backs of second and third person alike. Virgil moves through different phases of command, from second person singular imperative (*sparge* 347, *exerce* 370), to more general gerundives (*parcendum* 363, *texendae* 371, *scindendum* 399), to a straight third person description of the ideal farmer's actions (*iam tum....extendit.../rusticus*, 405-6), to the archaic 'future' imperative (*fodito, cremato* 408).³⁴

This sort of unrelieved drag is certainly the norm in these earlier books, and has been a major hook for pessimist readers.³⁵ But of course, we also have moments of remarkable remission from toil, when nature seems to reprise her golden age function and do all the work herself (before Jupiter spoiled it all: *ipsaque tellus / omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat*. 1.128).³⁶ After the vines come the olives, which basically grow themselves:

Contra non ulla est oleis cultura, neque illae
 procuruam exspectant falcem rastrosque tenacis,
 cum semel haeserunt aruis aurasque tulerunt;
 ipsa satis tellus, cum dente recluditur unco,
 sufficit umorem et grauidas, cum uomere, fruges.
 hoc pinguem et placitam Paci nutritor oliuam. (*Georgics* 2.420-5)³⁷

Conversely, no need to tend olives; they do not wait for the curved pruner and the clinging hoe, when they have got a grip on the fields and have toughed out

³⁴ On the sense of the *-to* imperative, see Gibson 1998: 83.

³⁵ Cf. Thomas' note *ad* 2.397-419; cf. Ross 1987: 138-42. On the contrast with 420ff., see Cramer 1998: 115.

³⁶ For the golden age as a Virgilian staple, see Smolenaars 1987; for the *Georgics*' golden age as something new and more labour-intensive, see Galinsky 1996: 93 (he does not ask 'who works?').

³⁷ Text is Mynors' *OCT*; translations are 'my own', if inspired by the Loeb (Goold's revised edition of Fairclough).

the drafts. The earth herself produces enough moisture when she is loosened up with the curved tooth of the hoe, as well as swollen fruits, when loosened up with the plough. In this way, nurture the juicy olive, that friend of Peace.

That *contra* inaugurates a section of the book in which the farmer can go on vacation; the requirements shift from performing action to absorbing information. The key linguistic marker of golden-age auto-production is that intensive adjective/pronoun *ipse* (see below); *ipsa...tellus* is a signature of such spontaneous generation which needs no input from human hands (cf. the recurrence of the collocation at 2.459-60; or *ipsae...silvae* 440).³⁸ *Ipse* becomes a marker of a ‘*plus quam*’ third person, or fourth person: that is, not the third person *agricola* who often doubles for the second person student, but a sign that that person can take a break, because the farm’s non-human elements are now running themselves. Virgil makes a similar exhibit of other self-managing trees immediately below. The fruit trees (*poma*) do it for themselves without need of our help (*ui propria nituntur opisque haud indiga nostrae* 428).³⁹ In these moments, the labour of the addressee is scaled back to that of a recumbent witness, who just sits back and enjoys the ride (*spectare, uidere* 437-8; cf. below). When there is no work for us to do, no pressing *cura* or *labor*, we take a load off.

These moments of slackery contribute to the view of book 2 as one of the ‘optimistic’, shiny sides of the *Georgics*;⁴⁰ and we shall see how its conventional counterpart, book 4, boosts that ‘optimism’ to unprecedented levels.⁴¹ But it is part of my task to show that the optimist/pessimist debate in the *Georgics* is misconceived in so far as it fails to ask precisely *how* and *for whom* these relative rations of optimism and pessimism, benefit and curse, are distributed.⁴² As I said above, both Reay and

³⁸ Cf. e.g. Thomas *ad* 200-1.

³⁹ Cf. Thibodeau 2011: 62 on the personification of natural entities.

⁴⁰ Mostly the older guard: Otis 1963: 153; Wilkinson 1969: 85, Buchheit 1972: 45-92, Smolenaars 1987. Contrast more recent pessimism from Kronenberg 2000.

⁴¹ Morgan 1999 is the most committed recent ‘optimist’ reading of book 4. For a straight-faced slog of an optimist reading of the whole poem, see Cramer 1998.

⁴² Cf. the founding question of Habinek 1998: 9: *cui bono*? It is not enough to take refuge in the ‘exquisite ambivalence’ of Griffin 1979: 72 – we need to look more closely at the entries on the balance sheet. The optimist side has been no better on this question: e.g. Morgan 1999:

Thibodeau show well how the poem brokers an interchangeability between various agents: rich owner, poor smallholder, slave *uilicus*, *agricola*, *colonus*, *pastor*.⁴³ But that version of ideology as blurred identity is not the whole story. When we get to book 3 – a notionally more ‘pessimistic’ book allowing little leeway for slackery, but still arguably a notch up the civilisational chain, in that it deals with labour foisted onto beasts – wealthy *agricola* and poor *colonus* part company.⁴⁴ It is here that Virgil splits society into a two-track system of privatised gains and socialised losses. The questions to ask are: *who works* (and what kind of work), who gains, who loses, and how?

Following the temple-building proem, the first half of book 3 is reserved for instructions on cattle and horse maintenance. These operations with large and valuable livestock obviously do not apply to a peasant smallholder; they must go straight for the estate owner.⁴⁵ The labour involved in this section is largely intellectual, cognitive, managerial, custodial, ‘white collar’.⁴⁶ With cattle-breeding, for example, a central task is mere ‘choosing’ of prime female forms (*corpora praecipue matrum legat* 51); likewise with the horses (*dilectus* 72). At first, it seems the generic second person at least has to see personally to the work of caring for these chosen animals: *praecipuum iam inde a teneris impende laborem* (74). But in practice, the ‘special’ work of the second person becomes fairly light, consisting of, say, a touch of mental arithmetic to keep track of the horses’ morale and ages (*ergo animos aeuumque notabis / praecipue* 100-1).

126 claims that civil war suffering worst affected the ‘crucial political elite’ – so the cannon fodder suffered less because they could not decorate it in writing?! On the history of ‘pessimism’ in debates about the *Georgics*, see Zanker 2011.

⁴³ Reay 2003: 22, 27; Thibodeau 2011: 19.

⁴⁴ A note on terms: both *agricola* and *colonus* can refer to either landowner or peasant (a point made by Fitzgerald 1996: 393-4, citing Kolendo 1993, 199-200; see also Reay 2003: 31, 38). I would argue that there is a slight semantic difference: *agricola* is more general, *colonus* connotes more direct contact with the land, and lowlier status (often ‘tenant farmers’: see *OLD colonus* 2).

⁴⁵ Cf. Thibodeau 2011: 33.

⁴⁶ Cf. Thibodeau 2011: 58-9.

Before long, the labour becomes purely spectatory (cf. above and below). Virgil invites his implicitly wealthy addressee to look on (*nonne vides* 103) as a special crew of horse trainers (*iuuenum* 105 = *illi* 106 = *magistri* 118) take over the reins.⁴⁷ Suddenly the work of breeding racers and chargers is fobbed off onto these third persons (118-19). The verses following (123-8) maintain these third person plurals, loading the *magistri* with the hard yards; while the horse itself is now being trained for *labori* (127). When the second person does return, it is for light-touch cameos: shooing the gadfly away (*arcebis grauido pecori* 155), or training up calves when they are nice and pliant (*faciles* 165; this privileged adjective will flourish in book 4). Following this, the second person essentially transfers the hard work onto the enslaved beast of burden (*seruitio* 168 – the slaves in this poem are indeed visible, just not in human form).⁴⁸ The relationship of domination is reflected in the next *labor* relative: the chariot horse-in-training becomes the baseline worker of the situation (*laboranti similis* 193). In this section, at least, it is clear that the second person does not have to do much at all; the real onus of the labour falls on the beasts, to a lesser extent on their trainers, and you, good manager, are free to kick back.

The situation changes in the second half of the book. After the digression on animal *amor*, Virgil reins himself back to the task at hand: the humble job of (writing about) tending the sheep and goats. We are surely no longer on high ground, but have moved across to peasant acreage, hand-to-mouth subsistence.⁴⁹ Down the social scale we bump till at last, some real work, for some honest *coloni*: *hic labor, hinc laudem fortes sperate coloni* (288). Virgil is marginally embarrassed, but he will do his best to dignify the topic (289-90). At this point, he modulates his didaxis to something slightly more aggressive, unafraid of issuing commands as first person statements: *edico* (295) orders around both the sheep and the shepherd on the job; *iubeo* (300)

⁴⁷ Thibodeau 2011: 59.

⁴⁸ Cf. Knapp 2011: 125. As Thibodeau 2011: 60-1 notes, there is always something lower down the hierarchy to be dominated.

⁴⁹ *Contra* Thibodeau 2011: 72, who sees a bumpier metamorphosis of addressee in this section.

must order the herdsman; and *iubebo* (329) tells the flocks directly where to go.⁵⁰ Both modest herdsman and lowly animal are on the receiving end of Virgil's noble *diktat* here. I am fairly sure he would not lord it over an absentee landowner of his own class like that.⁵¹ An elite Roman city-slicker may be able to think himself into the role of a quaintly hands-on *agricola* – but how about the shepherd at whom Virgil barks to squash that pest of a viper (for him?) (420-2)?! When the diseases come thick and fast from 440, the dirty work involving direct contact with animals is executed again by *magistri* (445), or a *pastor* (455); and the *pastores* (*pastorum* 477) are certainly the ones that suffered devastating losses to their stocks in the past plague Virgil uses to sign off the book.⁵² This is a moment where civilisation, shorn of its animal power, grazes rock bottom:

tempore non alio dicunt regionibus illis
 quaesitas ad sacra boues Iunonis et uris
 imparibus ductos alta ad donaria currus.
 ergo aegre rastris terram rimantur, et ipsis
 unguibus infodiunt fruges, montisque per altos
 contenta ceruice trahunt stridentia plaustra. (531-6)

That was the only time, they say, when cattle in those parts had to be sought out to perform Juno's rites, and chariots were led by ungainly buffaloes towards her high treasure chamber. So men laboriously tear up the ground with hoes, and dig the seed in with their own nails, and drag the creaky

⁵⁰ Cf. Thibodeau 2011: 30 on *iubeo* often indicating the presence of assistants (3.295-303 is discussed at 31).

⁵¹ The question of relative politeness in forms of command is sticky. Gibson 1998's crystal clear overview shows that didactic prose writers in the tradition of Varro avoid direct commands out of respect for their implied elite reader; didactic verse tends to retain the face-to-face colloquialism of the direct imperative, which is not inherently felt as too direct or impolite, but *can* be, depending on context (Gibson 1998: 78, 95-6). In any case, Virgil minces with the direct commands far less than both Cato and Varro (Thibodeau 2011: 44; for the figures, see Gibson 1998: 74-5, 80-1 (only for *Georgics* 1 and 3 mind)).

⁵² The lives of these *pastores* are far from the gilded existences of the *Eclogues*; on the appeal of the idealised pastoral life over that of the soil-worker, see Leigh 2016: 413.

wagons over the high hills by putting their neck into it.

In a grim parody of golden-age style *plus quam* third person, the crops are now sown by grubby hidden agents, the nails *themselves* (*ipsis*). Who are these poor campers forced to act as slavish beasts of burden;⁵³ indeed, die like them too, by contracting the illness themselves (563-6)? I am not sure. But *hic labor* takes on a sour note now. We understand, retrospectively, why these lowly *coloni* had to be so *fortes* in the first place. They are scratching at the coalface of natural disaster, digging their nails into the earth, self-sacrificing to the plague when it bites. One thing is for certain: they are not gentleman farmers.⁵⁴ For *they* now understand why it is advisable to conduct one's affairs of estate hands-off, at a healthy distance, through dispensable proxies.

There is a lot of hard work to be done in the earlier books of the *Georgics*. Sometimes that work will do itself; and the rugged slog up the hierarchy of nature, which sees us increasingly able to delegate the real backaches to beasts, puts humans in a relatively strong position. But the apparent amalgamation of the poem's second and third person heroes under indistinguishable nomenclature – *agricola* becomes *colonus* becomes *pastor et al.*, in the scheme of Reay and Thibodeau – does not mean that work is evenly assigned across the board. The head of the large farm can sit back and watch his trainers work up the next outstanding thoroughbreds; the poor peasant, exposed first hand to the devastation of plague, must plough the earth with his bare nails, or come down with the black death himself. Virgil marks the transition from high to low; but the catastrophic side of the low is something we high readers can only experience from afar, in our lucky present (474-7; cf. *dicunt* 531). It is this two-track society which book 4 celebrates and sublimates into a fixture of enduring beauty.

II WORK OF DIDAXIS NO MORE: BOOK 4

I have argued that it is not quite adequate – nor politically responsible – to take

⁵³ I wonder if *contenta ceruice* could also translate 'happy necks', i.e. Virgil forcing difficulty into voluntarism (see below).

⁵⁴ Cf. Spurr 2008: 29.

refuge under ‘blurred identity’. At every point, we would do well to resist the poem’s metamorphic spell by constantly probing: who is addressed? Who is described? Who works? Who does not have to? Turning to book 4, we shall now see where these questions can get us.

This book has always puzzled because of its bold formal implosion: it seems to break the mould of the primarily didactic poem it wraps up.⁵⁵ I shall argue here that this transcendence of form is enabled by the remarkable relief from labour which the book hymns: relief *for some*. The second person in this book has precious little work to do: maintaining the bees in the first half is a walk in the park, leaving him free to indulge in the exquisite Alexandrian poetry of the second half.⁵⁶ Virgil, too, is liberated from his command post of yelling orders, and free to spin a good descriptive yarn.⁵⁷ Direct address checks out; narrative checks in. But this is precisely because the farm is now ‘running itself’, money is growing on trees, honey is growing in hives, and real high ‘poetry’ can be alchemized from the proceeds. Yet somewhere, somehow, third persons are at work.

The book famously announces a departure in its proem, and this is largely due to the rebooting of industrial relations. Note the kind of work now in question, as well as the agents involved:

⁵⁵ Thomas *ad* 1-7 notes how the technical tradition subsides in this book; other scholars note its uniqueness (Thibodeau 2011: 159-60; Farrell 1991: 208-9; Ross 1987: 188-9).

⁵⁶ On the transition from second-person address to description, see Thomas *ad* 295-314.

⁵⁷ Dahlmann 1954: 552 sees that Virgil steps off the jussive and moves to a descriptive mode here (Perkell 1978: 212; cf. Wilkinson 1969: 4’s famous diagnosis of the *Georgics* as ‘descriptive poetry’). Interestingly, even in the ‘didactic’ part proper (say lines 1-280), the statistics for different imperatival expressions are very different to what Gibson counts for books 1 and 3 (1998: 80-1): while the ordinary imperative stays roughly the same (I count about 31 per cent of total imperativals, vs. 23 and 29 per cent for books 1 and 3 respectively), the third person jussive expression takes the lead by far (40 per cent, as opposed to 12 and 17 per cent for 1 and 3). However, these forms would both be trounced into insignificance if we counted all the *descriptive* third person indicatives applied to the bees – again, they do it themselves.

Protinus aërii mellis caelestia dona
exsequar: hanc etiam, Maecenas, aspice partem.
admiranda tibi leuium spectacula rerum
magnanimosque duces totiusque ordine gentis
mores et studia et populos et proelia dicam.
in tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria, si quem
numina laeua sinunt auditque uocatus Apollo. (4.1-7)

Right now I shall talk about that gift of the gods, ethereal honey. Maecenas, watch over this part of my poem also. The gripping stage-shows of the slightest little universe, the brave-hearted leaders, the customs and hobbies and clans and battles of an entire nation – I shall tell you in good order. The work is on a miniature scale; but the glory is by no means negligible, provided malign powers let one be, and Apollo listens when called.

Caelestia dona signals a new kind of divine gift economy (cf. the *numina* and Apollo), where we will be treated to something for nothing.⁵⁸ *Mollis* Maecenas, the poem's poshest alternate second person,⁵⁹ has up until this point been a figure either helping Virgil with the task at hand, or squeezing him for all he is worth (*haud mollia iussa* 3.41). But now all he has to do is sink into the sofa and observe (*aspicere* will be important below). Now for entertainment hour, the bees the hottest ticket in town (*admiranda...spectacula*). Again, the buzzword *labor* proclaims the shift. The work in this book will be in a very circumscribed area, i.e. not much at all; but the spoils (*gloria*) will be tremendous.⁶⁰ All Virgil has to do is keep up (*exsequar*); all Maecenas has to do is take his seat; and this micro-society will buzz to work, *for them*.

The other major second person in the didactic opening of book 4 – the

⁵⁸ Divine *munera* feature in 1.12 and 2.5; but these gifts are doubly heavenly (*aërii, caelestia*), and the godly benefactors will work much harder in book 4.

⁵⁹ On Maecenas' function as addressee, see Volk 2002: 129-38; Batstone 1997: 132-3; on the poem's split addressees, Rutherford 2008: 81-2; Reay 2003.

⁶⁰ As Mynors notes *ad loc.*, the phrase has Aratus *Phaen.* 761 simmering underneath: μόχθος μὲν τ' ὀλίγος, τὸ δὲ μυρίον αὐτίκ' ὄνειρα.

beekeeper – has a similarly light load. The best of the easy managerial and custodial roles of books 2 and 3 turns an even kinder shade of golden once we come to the bees. The commands tend to involve light actions: scattering willows and stones (*conice* 26) or leaves (*superinice* 46) for good habitat; scattering scents (*asperge* 62) or making a racket (*cie, quate* 64); or non-actions/prohibitions (*neu...sine, neue...ure...neu crede...47-8; prohibebis* 105). The work can also become strictly cognitive or hedonic, an experience of watching and marveling not so far from Maecenas' prime position (*suspexeris* 59; *mirabere* 60; *contemplator* 61).

This kind of intellectual/emotional action is a hallmark of the book, and perhaps its central task (cf. *mirabere* 197; *poteris cognoscere* 253; and forms of *mirari* discussed below). Otherwise, the maintenance work required to keep the bees in order is kept to a minimum. The raging civil war which periodically erupts can be dampened with a dash of dust (*pulueris exigui* 87).⁶¹ This beekeeper's storm in a teacup is easily calmed. When the bees look like they are slacking off in frivolous playtime (*ludo...inani* 105), all you need to do is de-wing the heads of state: ***nec magnus prohibere labor: tu regibus alas / eripe*** (106-7). Easy as apple pie. Even when there is the small hiccup of a mini-epidemic, the remedy is simple: look for some *amellus* to boil, a plant that makes short work for its search party (***facilis quaerentibus herba*** 272).

Not only is the work framed as unchallenging: the didactic flags used earlier in the poem to mark tedious grind are repurposed into billboards of how little there is left to do. *Quod superest* (2.346) and *superest* (2.354) back in book 2 beat out a drab percussion of 'ever more to do'. Look how the transitional phrase functions now:

quod superest, ubi pulsam hiemem sol aureus egit
sub terras caelumque aestiua luce reclusit,
illae continuo saltus siluasque peragant
purpureosque metunt flores et flumina libant
summa leues. (51-5)

⁶¹ On which see Thibodeau 2011: 190-1; Batstone 1997: 139-40.

As for the rest, when the golden Sun has driven winter out, flung it under the earth, and uncaged the sky with summer light, immediately they sweep across woods and groves, mow brilliant flowers, and with a light touch dip onto the surface of the stream.

Just as we gear up for some orders to carry out ('next!'...), i.e. what to do in the summer, we quickly change tack to a string of third person plural verbs. The bees take care of (it) themselves.

The remarkable relaxation of labour for the human second person (the beekeeper) is deeply related to this process of displacement onto (*plus quam*) third persons, in most cases the *bees themselves*. The intensive *ipse* dyes this book the colour of free-and-easy self-production.⁶² After Virgil urges us to the light task of shake, rattle and roll to get the bees going, they will kindly do the rest (**ipsae...ipsae** 65). The *reductio ad absurdum* of the bees' freakish self-sufficiency is their ability to reproduce asexually; and here too the process is marked by the magical *ipse* (**ipsae...ipsae** 200-1).

So powerful is this system of third-person voluntarist production that it rubs off on the world of human work too. I mentioned that the second-person is largely relieved of his labour duties, upgraded to a light supervisory role alongside Virgil and Maecenas. This is because the bees themselves (*ipsae*) are everywhere self-regulating;⁶³ but also because whatever manual labour *is* left over is shunted onto another *ipse*:

nec magnus prohibere labor: tu regibus alas
eripe; non illis quisquam cunctantibus altum
ire iter aut castris audebit uellere signa.
inuitent croceis halantes floribus horti
et custos furum atque auium cum falce saligna

⁶² *Ipse* blooms hard in book 4: from 10 occurrences in book 1, to 17 each in books 2 and 3, up to 33 in book 4.

⁶³ Cf. the goats returning of their own accord (*ipsae*) at 3.316 (see Thibodeau 2011: 68).

Hellespontiaci seruet tutela Priapi.
ipse thymum pinosque ferens de montibus altis
tectata serat late circum, cui talia curae;
ipse labore manum duro terat, **ipse** feraces
figat humo plantas et amicos inriget imbres. (106-15)

It is no big hassle to control them: rip off the kings' wings; no one will dare venture out into the air or sweep up the standards from the camp when the kings are stuck there. Let gardens vaped with saffron flowers lure them, and let the caretaker on watch against thieves and birds, that guardian, Priapus of the Hellespont, keep them safe with his sickle of willow. Let that one – the one whose job is to look after such things – bring thyme and pines from up in the hills, and plant them widely round their dwellings; let *him* wear out his hand with hard work, let *him* stick fruitful sprigs in the ground, and sprinkle over some welcome spray.

Here again, I think, we press up against the limits of interchangeability between the second and third person workforces. The *tu* is tasked with the modest, delicate work of wing-clipping.⁶⁴ But the custodial work (even that!) goes to Priapus (cf. *ille operum custos* of the bee-king, 215); and the real laborious *curae*, the gathering and planting, the action that 'wears out the hand with work', is outsourced to the third (world) nameless *ipse*. *Tu* and *ipse* are not equivalent here.⁶⁵ *Cui talia curae* is effectively a dismissive wave from the leisured beekeeper who can barely see these tasks beneath him. Virgil reassures: 'someone else will do it'.

But that is really the only touch of hard manual labour performed by humans in this whole first half of the book; otherwise, the bees are saddled with the grunt work. Their own disciplined *labor* is marked twice (*laborem* 156; *labor* 184). Their society is self-policing, and is itself divided into custodial and front-line roles (invigilators

⁶⁴ Mynors notes that the *tu* adds force to the precept here, i.e. 'here is something you too can do'; I would read it as a grab for our flagging attention, when we are running out of tasks.

⁶⁵ Thomas *ad* 109-11 takes them as alternative ways of referring to the same beekeeper; but the *cui* clause seems to function as a way of distinguishing one from another.

and agricultural labourers 158-9; guards (*custodia*) vs. drones 165-8);⁶⁶ but the sum effect is of a buzzing, harmonious operation (*labor omnibus unus* 184; *fervet opus* 169). Certain imagery forces us to take the bees as the very hardest of workers: the famous simile at 170-8 compares them to those first sweatshop slaves of Greek mythology, the Cyclopes. The efficient production line seems to be the common denominator of tenor and vehicle here, until Virgil steers it in another direction:

non aliter, si parua licet componere magnis,
Cecropias innatus apes amor urget habendi,
munere quamque suo. (176-8)

Just so, if small and big are comparable, an inborn desire for possession keeps the Cecropian bees going, each one performing its own special function.

The inbuilt materialism of the bees supposedly makes them work...as the Cyclopes' does for them? But this is a strange plane of comparison.⁶⁷ The Cyclopes work not from self-interest or greed, but from voluntary necessity, for someone else;⁶⁸ the bees, on the other hand, may have the desire for possession, but they are denied the right to keep any of the fruits of their labour. And *that* is just like the Cyclopes, in practice condemned to an eternal hell on the assembly lines of Jupiter's thunderbolt factory, even if they are understood as 'willing' workers.⁶⁹ The fiction of voluntarism implied by *amor habendi* (also the rationale for the proliferating intensive *ipse*) is a textbook

⁶⁶ Virgil's later moral bristling at the drones (taken from Hesiod, see Thomas *ad* 244) perhaps betrays an elite guilt complex: the drone who 'eats without working' is the slavish double of the landowner. The bees are no *lumpen* class of the uniform exploited, but a complex society with their own hierarchy and 'history' (on which see Ross 1987: 191; Habinek 1990: 210).

⁶⁷ The Cyclopes import military baggage too (see Giusti 2014: 48-52); but I am most interested in their subservient status here (cf. Giusti 2014: 56).

⁶⁸ On the two mythological strands of the Cyclopes (Homeric and Hesiodic), see Giusti 2014: 51. The Hesiodic (*Theog.* 139-46) has them working for Zeus; Callimachus *Hymns* 3.46-61 for Hephaestus; different master, same relation.

⁶⁹ The fact that the Cyclopes are beating out iron (*ferrum*) rather than ore (*massa*; cf. *Aeneid* 8.453, and Thomas *ad loc.*) is another way of compressing the hard work into something effortless (from an elite observer's perspective).

move in the ideology of oppression.⁷⁰ The bees *want* to work, they just *love* slaving away to forge our deluxe organic gold. They will give anything, just for the ‘love’ (205), just for the ‘glory’ of pumping out honey (205). And to this ‘natural’ love, just add an artificial squeeze:

quo magis exhaustae fuerint, hoc acrius omnes
incumbent generis lapsi sarcire ruinas
complebuntque foros et floribus horrea texent. (248-50)

The more the hoards are squeezed dry, the more intensely they all lean in to mend the ruins of their failed kind; they fill their cells and weave their barns with flower gum.

With a little bit of tweaking from the top, that is, productivity can be maximised. It is all about strategic incentives.⁷¹

As I said at the beginning of this article, this form of relationship – despoiling the agents of production, the *plus quam* third persons, of the product they have toiled to produce – has the deepest historical roots. While I am swerving clear of one-to-one allegory (which has always been yet another way of *putting the bees to work for us*),⁷² I must pause briefly to show what the rough historical symmetry I have in mind can do *for them*. The bees have seen two different camps of allegorising readership: let us call them close and distant readers.⁷³ The close readers see the bees as reflections on and of Rome, taking their cue from obvious signs like *Quirites* (201);⁷⁴ these bees,

⁷⁰ A key part of ‘naturalising’ slavery, on which see DuBois 2009: 320; cf. below on *uolentes* (4.561), and see Giusti (forthcoming) on the woven Britons at 3.25 willingly staging their own subjection.

⁷¹ Cf. Morley 2007: 469.

⁷² As Habinek 1990: 211 says, the similarities between humans and bees are alternately stressed and ignored.

⁷³ Cf. DuBois’ (2009: 323-4) similar terms of ‘close’ and ‘distant’ readers in attempts to reconstruct slave experience. Morgan 1999: 130 sees a different duality here: bees as humans in general, or Romans in particular.

⁷⁴ Griffin 1979: 63; but see Thomas *ad* 201 for a way around this.

good honest workers, are a model of high-functioning Roman society, minus the odd lapse into civil war.⁷⁵ The distant readers reject that identification; they seize instead on the ethnographic language with which the bees are described, or the slightly slavish devotion of the bees to their king (worse than the worst of the Easterners, 210-12).⁷⁶ There are rough edges and loose ends in both versions. The bluntest of historical allegories, for example, can take the obvious road to read the warring bee kings as the fresh civil conflict between Antony and Octavian, as above;⁷⁷ but then, who is this god-like beekeeper calling the shots from the shadows once the (minuscule amount) of dust has settled?⁷⁸ If these are Romans, who is stepping in to settle this? Who would be skimming the honey from *our* buzzing hives?

All allegorising readings fail at some hurdle,⁷⁹ as their stacked layers of meaning clash, grate, and buckle; but some, perhaps, fail better. It is not my job to generate yet another algorithm which decrypts poetry into straightforward political history. Rather, I would like to index the deeper structural relationship between bee farming and Roman imperialism. Neville Morley has already suggested the beekeeper's relationship to his miniature productive force can sometimes look like a rapacious Roman provincial governor shaking the pockets of his province.⁸⁰ There is something to this. Permit me to zoom out.

If we were to look anywhere for relevant newsworthy foreign affairs, we could do worse than Egypt: a freshly minted (30 B.C.E.) *sui generis* imperial province,⁸¹ the

⁷⁵ Griffin 1979: 68-9 reads the bees as a nostalgia trip back to the ways of old Rome. For other Romanising bee readings, see Briggs 1980, Nadeau 1984, Morley 2007; and cf. Giusti 2014: 44.

⁷⁶ Thomas (see e.g. *ad* 4.1-7) leads that charge, following Dahlmann 1954; cf. now also Lowrie 2015; cf. Griffin 1979: 64.

⁷⁷ See n. 2.

⁷⁸ Thomas *ad* 88ff. notes this problem; cf. Morley 2007: 464, Ross 1987: 190.

⁷⁹ On the bees' failure as allegory, see Batstone 1997: 139-41.

⁸⁰ Morley 2007: 469.

⁸¹ For Egypt as the recent site of Octavianic victory (30 B.C.E.), and the last of his triple triumphs which most probably formed the backdrop to the *Georgics*' debut, see Morgan 1999: 2, 4. For the relevance of Egypt to this section, see Morgan 1999: 135-7.

jewelled prize of the civil war, and a land mythologised as a kind of endlessly abundant source of grain.⁸² Egypt is dear to the heart of book 4 not just because the bees walk like Egyptians (among other orientalised king-worshippers, 210-12),⁸³ but because it furnishes the context for the *bugonia*: the miracle which frees us from any remnant of didactic labour, and launches us into the deluxe (Alexandrian) epyllion of the *Georgics*' twilight.⁸⁴ It is no coincidence that Virgil sites the founding practice of *bugonia* among the teeming soil of the Nile flood-plains (*et uiridem Aegyptum nigra fecundat harena* 291).⁸⁵ Here in Egypt, when the bee prospects look grim, another kind of *plus quam* third person naturally takes over the task of regeneration. The description of the Egyptian *bugonia* (295-313) glazes over the precise agents performing the process, but *they* are certainly third persons. Third person plural actions (*premunt*, *addunt* 297, etc.) – presumably assigned to generic Egyptians – are interspersed with straight passives (*eligitur* 296; *quaeritur* 300 etc.), yet another way to furnish the impression that this work is so easy, it really does itself.⁸⁶ And in any case, it is not long until the bees are back on the job, working through their own to-do list (e.g. *carpunt* 311). The common denominator between these mystery Egyptians and the bees they (re)produce is the ease with which team Egypt seems to get things done. Among this *gens fortunata* (287), blessed with a means of bottomless regeneration of bee stocks, the work runs of its own accord: the string of passives is the verbal equivalent of *ipse*, implying that the objects are really the subjects of their

⁸² Sorting agricultural output was one of Octavian's top priorities before leaving Egypt in 30 B.C.E. (Dio 51.18.1; Suet. *Aug.* 18.2; Strabo 17.1.3); the never-ending grain was what made this province invaluable (see Herklotz 2012: 15). Egypt is Augustus' biggest provincial boon to the treasury at Vell. 2.39. On agriculture and taxation in Roman Egypt, see Blouin 2012; Jördens 2012: 59-60. For Egypt as both anomalous and typical of Roman taxation upon its annexation, see Rathbone 1993; cf. Capponi 2005.

⁸³ For shades of Cleopatra here, see Thomas *ad* 210-8; cf. also Lowrie 2015: 337-8 on the orientalising of civil war, and distancing as processing.

⁸⁴ Mynors *ad* 187 posits a link between *bugonia* and Egypt in an earlier poetic account. Perhaps the famous *laudes Galli* Apocrypha (see Griffin 1979: 75-6 for dismissal on chronological grounds) was a response to the strange prominence of Egypt in the book?

⁸⁵ For Egypt as the perfect land of paradox here, see Morgan 1999: 136-8. Egypt as distant paradise takes on an equivalent role to Arcadia in Leigh 2016: 429.

⁸⁶ Cf. Perkell 1978: 219 on the impersonal narrative style creating distance here.

own action: the calf tracks itself down (299-300), or the innards liquefy themselves (302). This is a golden age task list of easily-performed or self-performing actions, written for a golden land, towards a golden end product. But my main point here is that this implied relationship – between bees and Egyptian farm hands – transcribes the sensation of how this newly annexed wing of the empire would feel to an elite Roman popping the champagne from afar.⁸⁷ As with his private estates, so with this new flagship land, and so with the bees: to the beekeeper beyond the fray or the toil, it would look like the product *was* effectively producing itself,⁸⁸ because the producers were just so damn *willing* to have their labour skimmed.⁸⁹

There may well be ways of pressing this connection even further: the manipulation of rival royal claimants sounds exactly like the dirty tactics of Roman diplomacy in Egypt in the years before it was finally coughed up as a province.⁹⁰ But for now, I merely hope to have shown up the radically different labour relations characterising this strange vacation of a book, and how that might harmonise with the soaring imperial high notes of c. 29 B.C.E. Virgil and Maecenas kick back and watch the show; the second person beekeeper makes the occasional light-touch intervention; all the while, the bees are burdened with a workload that is somehow ‘alleviated’ by the aggressive fiction of voluntarism; and in this sense, they channel the ‘happy’ subjects of an expanding and renewable empire of infinite grain. It seems that, for a certain chosen chunk of society at least, the hard work is over, because others are now doing it for ~~you~~ themselves. So far, we have talked mainly of second and third persons/worlds. But before we look at how this relationship migrates into the last half of the book, let us see how this cashes out for the first person: the bard himself, *Vergilius ipse*.

III TAKING TIME OFF / TIME TO TAKE OFF: THE BARD HIMSELF

⁸⁷ Cf. Thibodeau 2011: 107-8.

⁸⁸ Cf. Thibodeau 2011: 21.

⁸⁹ The miniature scale of the bees also creates a sense of comprehensive control for the detached observer; cf. Young 2013: 65-6 on the bee simile (=Carthage) in *Aeneid* 1.

⁹⁰ For Roman intervention in internecine conflicts among the Ptolemies in the 80’s B.C.E. see Thompson 1994 (*CAH* 9): 318; cf. the project to restore Auletes as king in the mid 50’s (320).

I have left purposefully blank one of the most overwritten slates of *Georgics* 4: the Corycian gardener ‘digression’ (116-48). Critics have worked hard to reconcile this curious praeteritio with the rest of the bees;⁹¹ and even to nut out precisely who this lucky Corycian might be.⁹² I shall argue that this is a key moment of Virgil’s own self-positioning within the empire of leisure. I claimed above that the short work/rich reward combination (*in tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria*) applied to Virgil and Maecenas’ privileged role of mutual spectatorship right from the off, and that this position of relative leisure rubs off on the second person beekeeper himself. But in this section, Virgil spells out the implications for *himself*, now is really the time *to take time off*.

You will remember that just prior to this passage, Virgil farmed out the hard labour to a nameless *ipse* (*ipse labore manum duro terat*); I read that ‘get someone else to do it’. This segues nicely into the announcement of the digression:

Atque equidem, extremo ni iam sub fine laborum
uela traham et terris festinem aduertere proram,
forsitan et pingues hortos quae cura colendi
ornaret canerem...(116-9)

And truly, if I were not already drawing in my sails, right at the pointy end of my task, and if I were not racing to nudge my prow to land, perhaps I would be singing of rich gardens, what work of tending would embellish them...

The link here might go thus: the vision of a *plus quam* third person doing manual work reminds Virgil of the poetic work that he could/should be doing at this point. But he is actually at the very *end* of those *labores*. So he does not have to bother thrashing out another elaborate chapter on this random gardener. As scholars have

⁹¹ The passage is critically overworked: see the bibliography in Volk 2008: 9.

⁹² See Leigh 1994: 181 (n. 3).

repeatedly underscored, this *senex* is perched on surplus land⁹³ beyond the bounds of the *Georgics*:⁹⁴ the leftovers of the countryside (*relicti...ruris* 127-8). However magnanimous it is of Virgil to jam this section in, the framing device tells us that he *does not have to do it*. Indeed, there is an implicit contrast between the romanticised yet menial task-list of the *senex* himself, and Virgil's paraded freedom not to bother.⁹⁵

ille etiam seras in uersum distulit ulmos
eduramque pirum et spinos iam pruna ferentes
iamque ministrantem platanum potantibus umbras.
uerum haec ipse equidem spatiis exclusus iniquis
praetereo atque aliis post me memoranda relinquo. (144-8)

He also arranged late-season elms row-by-row, and hard pears, and blackthorns already sporting sloe berries, and plane trees already giving shade to people stopping by for a drink. But I myself skip over all that, shut in by straitening bounds, and I leave the job of setting it down to others after me.

While this geriatric wonder performs some bracing tasks on a bit of land nobody wants, the poet himself (note *ipse equidem*) flaunts his right *not* to work, or not to sing, for that is the contrastive force of *uerum* (answering *equidem...canerem*, 116-19). *Spatii exclusus iniquis* is usually taken to mean Virgil recusing himself because of the poem's shrinking space,⁹⁶ but we could also read it 'shut out from these small-fry lots', or 'exempted from having to write about this no man's land'; the world of the self-sufficient gardener is beneath him.⁹⁷ In any case, Virgil's actions as masterly *ipse* stem from the freedom to slack off and leave the job (garden or poem) to *others* (*aliis*). At the very moment we glimpse the Corycian hard at it, Virgil flaunts that he

⁹³ For an aestheticising reading of such excess, see Perkell 1989: 172. At a narrative level too, this excursus is a 'luxury' section it; see Mynors *ad* 116ff.

⁹⁴ Thomas 1982: 56-60 also points out we are out of bounds here (see Thomas *ad* 116); cf. Thomas *ad* 127-8.

⁹⁵ Cf. Volk 2002: 140-1 on the fiction of external constraints masking 'the poet's choice' here.

⁹⁶ Mynors *ad* 147-8.

⁹⁷ Some have inevitably seen the gardener as a poet (Thibodeau 2001: 185).

can delegate the tedious details to the invisible hands of the future.

There would be a touch more piquancy to this scene if we trusted Servius' historical labeling of this poor old *senex* as one of the Cilician pirates resettled by Pompey after his famed sweep of the seas; we would see the empire's ruthless efficiency at putting the conquered *to work*.⁹⁸ But even without it, we can lay bare the structural similarities connecting this scene to the bees in which it is embedded. In bee-land, we have a second-person beekeeper loafing around without much work to do except *observing* his busy bees 'happily' giving it their all; in Tarentum, we have a first-person poet remembering how he *saw* an old Corycian, poor in acreage but rich in heart (*animis* 132), merrily leaning in.⁹⁹ In both cases, the comfortable audience member, who does not have to work, aestheticises the work of the producer as something hard but rewarding, exhausting yet dignifying, not to mention pleasurable. In this world where all is humming along smoothly, Virgil seldom lets slip the violence greasing the wheels. But then we notice that the Corycian is also a beekeeper:

ergo apibus fetis idem atque examine multo
primus abundare et spumantia cogere pressis
mella fauis; (139-41)

So that same man was first to overflow with breeding bees and a huge swarm, and first to force the foaming honey by putting pressure on the combs.

Here the language is blunt: the hot-off-the-press honey is *forced* from the combs under *pressure*. Rather than lapping up the old man for all his delicious golden age abundance, we can also thank him for laying bare the brute force at the frontline of extraction. We should bear this in mind as we move to the second half of the book: where labour – for Virgil, Aristaeus, and us, at least – seems to be a thing of the past.

IV WINDING DOWN

⁹⁸ For a roundabout defence of Servius' comment here, Leigh 1994.

⁹⁹ In reality these tasks would have killed the old man: see Mynors *ad* 144-6.

So far we have tracked a system where work is left to third persons; and where, with the help of a mysterious automation and universal voluntarism, the work seems simply to ‘do itself’; and thereby both first and second person are freed up to enjoy a very easy ride. In this last section, we shall see how these relationships are further pickled into the famous Aristaeus and Cyrene epyllion. I want to read this myth as an action not just for bee regeneration, but for the leisure, ease, divine favour, and entitlement enjoyed at the top of Roman society: a happy bulletin that we can afford to slack off, because someone will always be around to pick up our slack.

At this hinge in the book, the work of ‘manual’ didaxis (i.e. the mode of first-person instructor issuing commands to second-person enactor) is formally put to bed – although, as we have seen, the bond of the grind had been weakening significantly anyway. Virgil is now in the mood for 100 per cent marvel, and so the speech-act frame turns from ‘do this light task’ to ‘enjoy this story time’. The transition is flagged with a remarkable invocation of a new set of second-persons – the Muses – which itself indexes a privileged new access to the divine, and a new economy of gifts from on high.¹⁰⁰ Just after Virgil concludes his précis of the Egyptian *bugonia*, he scales up:

Quis deus hanc, Musae, quis nobis extudit artem?
unde noua ingressus hominum experientia cepit? (4.315-6)

What god hammered out this trick for us, Muses? From where did this new practice begin?

Suddenly we are in another realm, where the Muses can be accessed on demand,¹⁰¹ and a god is the one ‘smashing out the method’ *for us*. This follows through on the promise of book 4’s opening *caelestia dona* (4.1). But the collocation *extundere*

¹⁰⁰ On the generic modulation upwards here, see Rutherford 2008: 87.

¹⁰¹ And Virgil promised us he would bring them back as booty to his homeland in triumph (*deducam* 3.11). See Volk 2002: 150; Morgan 1999: 58. On the ambitious parallelism between poet and ruler in the prologue to 3, see Morgan 1999: 56; Buchheit 1972: 146-8.

artem makes the point even more strongly. It remarkably rewires the very different relationship of Jupiter to the farmer in book 1, which hailed the end of the *ipsa tellus* free-for-all (*extunderet artis* 1.133).¹⁰² Back in that barren patch of earth, Jupiter only made things (including honey) harder to get so that human trial and error (*usus* 1.133) could fashion skills for us; humans overcame draconian interventions from the top with their own hard labour. *Usus* was the craftsman. But now we are on holiday: a god is suddenly working *for us (nobis)*, for free. Not only that, but the gods of poetry (*Musae*) are at hand to help the poet too. We are allowed to get fat off corporate charity from the skies above.

As we switch off the didaxis and live off the interest, Aristaeus becomes the ultimate Lord of Leisure.¹⁰³ The hero, having lost his stock of bees, immediately calls on mother Cyrene to bail him out; and the amount of help he will enjoy throughout makes it doubtful that ‘Aristaeus’ is actually the answer to *quis deus?*¹⁰⁴ Here our verb *extundere* strikes again:

‘mater, Cyrene mater, quae gurgitis huius
ima tenes, quid me praeclara stirpe deorum
(si modo, quem perhibes, pater est Thymbraeus Apollo)
inuisum fatis genuisti? aut quo tibi nostri
pulsus amor? quid me caelum sperare iubebas?
en etiam hunc ipsum uitae mortalis honorem,
quem mihi vix frugum et pecudum custodia sollers
omnia temptanti **extuderat**, te matre relinquo.
quin age et ipsa manu felices erue siluas,
fer stabulis inimicum ignem atque interfice messis,
ure sata et ualidam in uites molire bipennem,
tanta meae si te ceperunt taedia laudis.’ (4.321-332)

¹⁰² Thomas *ad* 315 notes that *extudit artem* here roots Aristaeus in the age of Jupiter; but the relationship between god and man is now completely different. Cf. also Morgan 1999: 90.

¹⁰³ Aristaeus’ passivity militates against Morgan’s (1999: 90, 150) equation of him with the active, demiurgic principle of the universe.

¹⁰⁴ As Mynors notes *ad loc.*, the answer to this question is far from clear.

‘My mother, my mother Cyrene, you who live right down the bottom of this pool, why did you give birth to me from that high pedigree of the gods (well, if my father is truly Thymbraean Apollo, as you say), to be the scorn of the Fates? Or where has your love for me been thrust? Why did you tell me to hope for heaven? Here, even this here prize of my mortal life, which the skilled tending of crops and flocks barely hammered out for me despite my best efforts – even if you are my mother, I let it go. But come on, tear up my lush woods with your hand, do it yourself, set a nasty flame to my stalls, murder my crops, burn my seeds, heave a hefty axe against my vines, if such powerful disgust for my honour has taken hold of you.’

This is an interesting moment, for it condenses within Aristaeus a kind of turning point in relations of work and power. Aristaeus claims his *honor* was wrought for him by genuine hard work, or at least the kind of custodial slog (note *custodia* again) that weighed down the modest *pastor* of book 3 (and Aristaeus is introduced explicitly as *pastor*, 317).¹⁰⁵ But it is precisely this ‘prize’ – of tedious hard work – that he is now in a position to give up. Just as Virgil can leave behind his quaint period furniture of a Corycian labourer, so can Aristaeus now surrender his cross (*relinquo* again; cf. 127, 148). Now we see yet another hand onto which the work is displaced. Aristaeus’ commands, however ironic, hypothetically foist that work onto Cyrene, who becomes a destructive recast of the manual labourer in 114: *ipse labore manum duro terat* becomes *quin age et ipsa manu felicitis erue silvas*.¹⁰⁶ Look who will have to *moliri* now.

Here we have a clue that Aristaeus will be the hero of this story not despite, but *in so far as*, he does nothing himself. For the rest of the tale, we are treated to a world of perfect ease, where, thanks to the swift work of a goddess, things basically figure themselves out. Aristaeus’ call gets through as Cyrene sits among the nymphs, all of

¹⁰⁵ Proteus too, without the explicit word (395); see Morgan 1999: 215.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas *ad* 329 recalls *ipse manu* of 3.395 too, where it is used to command the lowly *pastor*; cf. Virgil’s command to kill the snake at 3.420 (*cape saxa manu*). Cyrene is treated here as little more than a farmhand.

them performing a male fantasy of effortless domestic labour (*molliā pensa/ deuoluunt* 348-9) while they listen to charming poetry.¹⁰⁷ As soon as Arethusa confirms that it is indeed Aristaeus *ipse* (354) wailing like a baby, she hops to a decisive intervention for her precious little guy, her *maxima cura* (354 – the word indicates that the burden of care, and labour in general, has passed from the hero's shoulders, and onto Mummy's). Cyrene takes on the didactic function with divine efficiency. She orders Aristaeus be brought to her, and parts the red sea to swallow him into the fold without fuss (357-62). All the hero has to do is take it all in: *mirans* (363), *stupefactus* (365), and *spectabat* (367) are the orders of the day, as Aristaeus – like Virgil, Maecenas, and the beekeeper – is relieved of all duties, apart from the task of sightseeing.¹⁰⁸

Cyrene is not just an enabler here: she is a doer, the latest in the long line of *plus quam* third persons to whom this book assigns nearly every difficult task. She is the one (*ipsa* 381) who prays to Ocean and the Nymphs; she is the one (*ipsa* 386) who gives Aristaeus precise instructions on how to capture and interrogate Proteus. But she does not stop at speech acts; she will be with Aristaeus all the way, so that the daunting task of locking up a god will seem like child's play:

hic tibi, nate, prius uinclis capiendus, ut omnem
expediat morbi causam euentusque secundet.
Nam sine ui non ulla dabit praecepta, neque illum
orando flectes; uim duram et uincula capto
tende; doli circum haec demum frangentur inanes.
ipsa ego te, medios cum sol accenderit aestus,
cum sitiunt herbae et pecori iam gratior umbra est,
in secreta senis ducam, quo fessus ab undis
se recipit, **facile** ut somno adgrediare iacentem. (396-404)

¹⁰⁷ On 'captivation' as another form of wonderment here: see Thibodeau 2011: 194-5.

¹⁰⁸ A similar situation pairing wonder/admiration and *labor* (in my scheme, wonder as the hedonic pay-off of others' *labor*) passes into the bee simile of *Aeneid* 1.430-6 (see Giusti 2014: 42).

First thing you will have to take him in chains, my son, so that he unleashes the full cause of the disease, and makes it all end up all right. For without violence, he will not give you any guidance, nor will you twist his arm by prayer; impose brute force and chains on the prisoner; on these alone will his vain tricks be smashed. I myself will take you into the old man's inner sanctum, when the sun has fired its midday heat, when the grass is parched, and the shade is now even more welcome to the flock, the sanctum where he repairs from the water, exhausted. That way, you can attack him easily as he lies there sleeping.

Violence will be required. But Cyrene herself (*ipsa ego*) will guide Aristaeus, to make things easy. *Facile* is in fact a watermark concept for this part of the *Georgics*, with its spate of easy actions, and everything eminently 'doable' (*facile* > *facere*; cf. *facultas* 437).¹⁰⁹ The facility stems from the fact that Cyrene is spoon-feeding the hero silly.¹¹⁰ She *herself* (*ipsa* 424) puts Aristaeus in place for the ambush. When the focus moves to a less cooperative third person, Proteus himself (*ipse* 391, 433),¹¹¹ Aristaeus forcefully pins the god down in order to fleece him of narrative treasure, and gives him absolutely nothing of verbal payment in advance:

‘nam quis te, iuuenum confidentissime, nostras
iussit adire domos? quidue hinc petis?’ inquit. at ille:
‘scis, Proteu, scis **ipse**; neque est te fallere quicquam
sed tu desine uelle. deum praecepta secuti
uenimus hinc lapsis quaesitum oracula rebus.’ (445-9)

¹⁰⁹ Such ease reverses Jupiter's contribution in book 1.121-2: *pater ipse colendi / haud facilem esse uiam uoluit*.

¹¹⁰ As my reviewer points out, divine aid to mortals is par for the course in the epic tradition; however, I would argue that Aristaeus is *particularly* pampered and passive in this episode.

¹¹¹ We might note other Egyptian links: the Proteus tale is usually anchored off Egypt (in Lycophron's version, he was even said to have come from there, see Thomas *ad* 390-1). The name Cyrene channels Callimachus (the Alexandrian's) birthplace (an author all over this section), as well as being a gift from Ptolemy to Rome in 74 B.C.E.; cf. Morgan 1999: 19. On the new Octavianic order (including taxation) in Cyrene post 31 B.C.E., see Reynolds and Lloyd 1996 (*CAH* 10): 631-2.

He said: ‘But who told you, you cocky youth, to attack my house? Or what are you looking for here?’ But Aristaeus: ‘you are well aware, Proteus, you yourself are well aware; no one can get anything by you, but nevertheless, you should stop wanting to get one by us. We have followed the gods’ instructions, and we have come to seek from here an oracle for our deflated fortunes.’

From Aristaeus’ economising perspective here, there is no need to reply; Proteus knows the answer to that question *himself*. Aristaeus does not lift a finger for Proteus; in this way he figures Virgil, who now lets *others* take up the burden of direct speech in a poem whose speech acts have been hitherto the exclusive province of the poet himself.¹¹² Here, Aristaeus’ (mother-smoothed) action on the old man of the sea – who is also, in a sense, a kind of *pastor* (*ipse uelut stabuli custos* 433) – is another moment in which the world of effortless ease coughs up its own dark phlegm of *force majeure*; the violence on which such ease is predicated. Aristaeus either gets what he wants simply by asking nicely; or, if the world resists, he bends it to his will with chains¹¹³ (*manicisque iacentem / occupat* 439-40; cf. *uinclis* 396, 405). In that sense, Aristaeus is a true imperial (not just a ‘culture’)¹¹⁴ hero.

Aristaeus is not the only one pressing Proteus for a story. One of the most prominent narrative verbs of book 4 is also a verb of ‘freedom’: *expedire*, to ‘unbind’ as well as ‘unfold’ in the sense of ‘tell a story’. Virgil claims he will free up some words twice: first of the bee natures (*expediam* 149); then of the origins of *bugonia* (*expediam* 286). Both of these moments mark a gear-change in discourse which can be understood as a form of ‘unbinding’: namely, the shift from second-person imperatival didaxis to third person narrative, from ‘binding’ to ‘optional’, or

¹¹² Milnor 2014: 260 notes that the *Georgics* contains precious little direct speech until late in book 4.

¹¹³ This kind of physical coercion was of course used on recalcitrant slaves: Joshel 2010: 176. Chains are a Virgilian addition to Homer’s version here; Morgan 1999: 44 suggests an etymologising connection between *uincula* and *uis*.

¹¹⁴ Although Perkell 1978: 215 thinks him only a ‘culture hero’ in other accounts.

‘prescriptive’ to ‘descriptive’ in Gibson’s terminology.¹¹⁵ The third and final time the verb appears, it is part of Cyrene’s instructions:

hic tibi, nate, prius uinclis capiendus, ut omnem
expediat morbi causam euentusque secundet. (396-7)

First thing you will have to take him in chains, my son, so that he unleashes
the full cause of the disease, and makes it all end up all right.

I skipped over this above, but note the paradoxical combination of *uinclis capiendus* with *expediat*: Proteus must be imprisoned before he can ‘unleash’ the origin of the disease. This is a sign that Virgil, too, is assigning even this last and easiest task of setting words free, of storytelling, to a monkey god whom his exploitative avatar Aristaeus is about to chain to the stage and make dance.

So Proteus gives up his magic, and his words, in response to force (*ui...multa* 450); we shall come back to that act of force in a moment. First, let us race to the final resolution of history’s first *bugonia*.¹¹⁶ After hearing Proteus’ yarn, Aristaeus looks a little shell-shocked (*timentem* 530).¹¹⁷ He must have enjoyed watching Proteus squirm; but there is still the work to be done of deciding what this all means. Cyrene comes to the rescue yet again.¹¹⁸ Mother tells son not to worry about anything (*licet...deponere curas* 531); she starts glossing the story nicely herself. The nymphs are to blame for this curse, but luckily, they are *facilis* (535) – tractable goddesses, so making it up to them will be a cinch. Cyrene leaves him with a textbook list of clear instructions for the first *bugonia*. Our hero discharges the orders without further ado,

¹¹⁵ Gibson 1998: 89-90, 93-6.

¹¹⁶ The friction between this original *bugonia* and that of 281-314 has sprung migraines; as Thomas *ad* 538-58 points out, this version is even crazier, and much more wasteful. For a religious account of the *bugonia* here (i.e. a restoration of the cosmic order through sacrifice), see Habinek 1990 (cf. Morgan 1999: 112); *contra*, Thomas 1991.

¹¹⁷ As Thomas 1991: 218 notes, Aristaeus is barely affected by the Orpheus story; cf. Thibodeau 2011: 198.

¹¹⁸ On Cyrene as interpreter here (a ‘figure of practical disambiguation’), see Batstone 1997: 128.

becoming the very model of effortless didactic leap from command to execution.¹¹⁹
And Hallelujah! We have a Christmas miracle on our tables:

haud mora, continuo matris praecepta facessit:
ad delubra uenit, monstratas excitat aras,
quattuor eximios praestanti corpore tauros
ducit et intacta totidem ceruice iuuenas.
post, ubi nona suos Aurora induxerat ortus,
inferias Orphei mittit, lucumque reuisit.
hic uero subitum ac dictu mirabile monstrum
aspiciunt, liquefacta boum per uiscera toto
stridere apes utero et ruptis efferuere costis,
immensasque trahi nubes, iamque arbore summa
confluere et lentis uuam demittere ramis. (548-58)

No dallying, immediately he carries out his mother's instructions: he comes to the shrine, raises the altars she had told him to, leads four of the best bulls, outstanding forms, and just as many heifers whose necks were unyoked. After, when the ninth dawn had brought on the sunrise, he gives Orpheus the rites of the dead, and comes back to the grove. But here they feast their eyes on a sudden sight, incredible to tell: throughout the melted innards of the oxen, in the whole stomach, bees buzzed and fizzed from the split sides, huge clouds dragged behind, and now they flooded the top of a tree, and drooped in clusters from the bending branches.

Aristaeus seems to perform all of this himself, at least from the look of those third person singular verbs. Does he finally work through the chores his mother sets him then? I am not so sure. Firstly, there are gaps in the repetition of initial command in subsequent action:¹²⁰ no mention of the *act* of killing the animals, whether they be the four bulls and four heifers (538-543), or the black ewe targeted for Orpheus (546),

¹¹⁹ Cf. Hardie 1998: 46.

¹²⁰ Such doubling is Homeric (Morgan 1999: 41); but the immediate fulfilment of command in execution, together with the omissions, are striking.

or the calf for Eurydice (547). There may be a sense that Aristaeus does not bother doing everything he is told (naughty boy).¹²¹ But there is another option. We could (should) take those verbs as delegative or causative: Aristaeus does not *do* these things, but has them done.¹²² From Aristaeus', Virgil's, our perspective, each step need not be mentioned, because the work is outsourced; it feels instantaneously *done*. The clue is in the sharp, abrasive transition to *aspiciunt* – one of the hanging threads by which the *Georgics*' system of displaced labour is most spectacularly unraveled. For suddenly we realise that Aristaeus had *helpers* all along – and they were not just his mother.¹²³ Behind every good man, there is a good woman, but also a good team of delegated labour, with nothing to lose but their chains. A suite of slaves who make it all look easy.¹²⁴

Aspiciunt does one thing other than make the silent human underworld of the *Georgics* visible: it also renders it invisible again, in a puff. For it forces us to divert our gaze from this unfamiliar audience of master and slaves, together in the picture for a rare snap, and onto the sight at which they are marvelling, the *dictu mirabile monstrum* (554) itself. As in the account of the Egyptian *bugonia* above, our attention is diverted from the impersonal hands behind the production, to the products themselves, which pump us metamorphically through several books of the *Georgics*: the cattle of book 3 become the bees of book 4, yes, but they also form clouds, which settle on top of a tree to become a bunch of grapes (book 2) ripe for the plucking. That hardest of tasks – viticulture – which required some of the roughest preparatory work in the poem, is telescoped into an immediate supply. Human labour is finally

¹²¹ Thibodeau 2011: 199 thinks Aristaeus is denied the chance to perform all the tasks – wonderment intervenes.

¹²² The ease with which the actions are performed is captured also in *intacta...ceruice*, i.e. the sacrificial fiction of willingness over compulsion (here I side with Habinek 1990: 212, *pace* Thomas 1991: 214).

Thibodeau 2011: 31's notion of 'delegated' verbs (X does Y = X orders Y to be done) is extremely useful here.

¹²³ The moment compares to a handful of others where slaves or labourers are implicitly present (Reay 2003: 36-7 isolates two cases).

¹²⁴ We might picture the 'state' slaves of Rome here, *uictimarii* used in public sacrifices (see Bradley 2010: 629)

suspended once and ‘for all’, as Aristaeus and his party join Maecenas (cf. *aspice* 1),¹²⁵ Virgil, and beekeeper to *see* everything suddenly growing on trees. I can only imagine what an agricultural slave would be thinking when his master told him to slaughter ten precious animals in exchange for boutique bees.¹²⁶

Some may accuse me of reckless misreading here. That is a lot of weight for a little word (*aspiciunt*) to bear. There is also the problem that the Aristaeus of the Proteus fiasco did seem to work, and work hard. A sceptic might say, after all, that Cyrene’s role was purely the opening of a door. Our hero still had to walk through it. *He* was the one who pinned the god down with fetters and force. Both Cyrene’s command and Aristaeus’ execution were all in the singular:

hic **tibi**, nate, prius uinclis capiendus

...uim duram et uincula capto

tende;...

uerum ubi correptum manibus uinclisque **tenebis**, (396, 399-400, 405)

First thing you will have to take him in chains, my son...impose brute force and chains on the prisoner;...but when you hold him seized fast by hands and chains,

uix defessa senem **passus** componere membra

cum clamore **ruit** magno, manicisque iacentem

occupat. (438-40)

He did not even let the old man gather his tired limbs, before he rushed him with a huge shout, and seizes him in fetters as he is lying there.

¹²⁵ As my anonymous reader points out, these senses of *aspicere* are different. Maecenas’ look is a kind of sustained presence, a period of attention; the *aspiciunt* of this group is a quick perception, a momentary revelation. If Maecenas can afford to put his feet up and look over a whole book of Virgil, this silent collective will be back to work in a flash, as soon as the miracle is over.

¹²⁶ Cf. Thomas *ad* 281ff.: ‘who in the Mediterranean would kill an ox in order to gain a hive?’

The fact that, notwithstanding mother doing most everything but the final step, Aristaeus is told to, and seems to, perform the crucial action of capture *himself* is a hugely significant twist to the Homeric Proteus episode, but the modification has largely been left untouched.¹²⁷ In the *Odyssey*, command and execution are necessarily *plural*. Overpowering Proteus is no mean feat, and it takes Menelaus plus three comrades. The presence of the comrades is marked hard throughout. The crucial moment of capture, for example, falls in the plural: ‘ἡμεῖς δὲ ἰάχοντες ἐπεσσύμεθ’, ἀμφὶ δὲ χεῖρας / βάλλομεν’ (‘We rushed upon him with a shout, and threw our arms about him’ *Odyssey* 4.454-5). So we are trained to expect a team effort here. Which is why I suspect that even these singular verbs (*tenebis*; *occupat*) in Virgil have a darkly ‘delegative’ force; instead of poetic plurals, then, perhaps we can talk of ideological singulars. They are claims to the performance of a work shared by *many* hands in Homer; and as I suspect here, work actually performed by everyone *but* Aristaeus. For the hero may well let something comparable to *aspiciunt* slip when he briefly explains his purpose to Proteus:

‘deum praecepta **secuti**
uenimus hinc lapsis quaesitum oracula rebus.’ (448)

‘We have followed the gods’ instructions, and we have come to seek from here an oracle for our deflated fortunes.’

With the first-person plural, Aristaeus admits the presence of others; to read it as ‘poetic’ would be to implicate ourselves in the craft of disappearance. The lapse lays bare what Virgil has sliced from Homer in order to make his hero serviceable to the *poeta creator* myth of elite labour,¹²⁸ the cheek of framing command as synonymous with execution. Suddenly *ui...multa* looks more like the ‘force of many people’ than

¹²⁷ Morgan 1999: 20-1 notes that this episode is a closer ‘imitation’ than anything in Virgil, and provides detailed lexical backup (219-22). But he makes nothing of the switch from comrade muscle to individual action.

¹²⁸ A favourite trope of the *Georgics*: see Morgan 1999: 59; the original concept comes from Lieberg 1982.

Aristaeus' singular power; and Cyrene's *manibus* seem not Aristaeus' hands, but the hands of those around him, perhaps even whole companies of helpers (*manibus* = collectives of men?). Despite efforts otherwise, the *Georgics* does not manage to lock away these workers within the cell of invisibility so cleanly after all.

I have argued that looking (*aspicere*) is a key act here; but also that we should not always see what Virgil means us to look at. There is one more confluence of looking and luxury to mention, which brings us to Orpheus. This lengthy built-in tale is another one of the many features of book 4 which is 'surplus to requirements'. Here we have a labour(er) of love, and a story wherein a certain form of luxury looking is explicitly prohibited. The poem's last occurrence of *labor* is a case of labour undone:

restitit, Eurydicenque suam iam luce sub ipsa
immemor heu! uictusque animi respexit. ibi omnis
effusus labor atque immitis rupta tyranni
foedera, terque fragor stagnis auditus Auernis. (4.490-3)

He stopped fast, and at the very cusp of the light, cast his eyes back to his Eurydice – so forgetful, alas! – his purpose undone. At that moment, all his hard work melted away, the awful tyrant's deal fell through, and a burst of thunder made itself heard three times through the pools of Avernus.

omnis / effusus labor, a riff on the programmatic *labor omnia vicit / improbus* (1.145-6)¹²⁹, is no reprisal of the *Georgics*' earlier iron law of entropy,¹³⁰ which demanded a lot of work for little headway. It is the flip side. The phrase advertises that we are now at a point where *labor* can be left to bubble over; it is a resource no longer needed by the poem's first and second person, for other people have been conscripted to do it for them. *Labor* is now overflowing, or magically self-regenerating, like the Nile in spate (*effuso stagnantem flumine Nilum* 288), or the stream of bees pouring from the ox's corpse (*donec ut aestiuus effusus nubibus imber / erupere* 312-3). We are now sitting pretty: *labor* can be wasted and the *labor* of poetry produced in its stead. And for that,

¹²⁹ On which vexed phrase see Jenkyns 1993; Batstone 1997: 138.

¹³⁰ *Contra* Thomas *ad* 491-2.

we do not even need a living agent. Orpheus can be scattered on the fields for fertiliser (522),¹³¹ his decapitated head will float along the Hebrus, and we will still have his poetry, the *uox ipsa* (525). The song will keep on singing...*itself*.

The idea that poetry is a luxury product which is directly dependent on the labour of others is brought home at the end of the poem. We have seen many heroes slack off, and enjoyed our own second-person leisure time in tandem. But Virgil clocks off by explicitly pointing out the unbreakable co-dependency between literature and leisure:¹³²

haec super aruorum cultu pecorumque canebam
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
fulminat Euphraten bello uictorque uolentes
per populos dat iura uiamque adfectat Olympo.
illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuuenta,
Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi. (559-66)

I was singing of this on top of the cultivation of land, cattle, and trees, while the great Caesar was thundering out his wars by the deep Euphrates and – *qua* victor – was granting laws throughout the willing nations, and striving to make the path to heaven. At that time, sweet Parthenope was mothering me – Virgil – as I bloomed with the arts of workaday leisure, and messed with shepherd tunes, and as a bold youth sang ‘you, Tityrus, under the cover of a spreading beech.’

Here Virgil finally sketches the blueprint for an empire of leisure. Caesar the victor

¹³¹ See Morgan 1999: 198-9; 230-5.

¹³² On Virgil’s celebration of philosophical leisure also crowding out slavery here, see Leigh 2016: 428-9.

stomping all over the world, distributing ‘laws’ among ‘willing’ (*uolentes*) peoples,¹³³ a growing stock of humans that would just love to pay for the privilege of being ruled. All the while our poet gets to kick back,¹³⁴ not a care in the world; all the while his Cyrene, the very maternal Naples, i.e. Parthenope, was taking good care of him (*alebat*).¹³⁵ The temporal relationship between empire-building and singing – one of mere synchrony or contrast, implied by *dum* – fudges a deeper *causality*. That is the point of this article. Conquest has raked more grain into Rome than ever; and it has brought slave labour to work the land which profit-prophets like Virgil owned.¹³⁶ So this was the *otium* of the *Eclogues* all along, despite the apparent about-face from bucolic leisure to georgic labour. Lest we forget, the *sphragis* clinches it: Virgil’s poetry was the fruit of someone else’s labour.¹³⁷ And I am not talking about Caesar’s.

V CLOCKING OFF, CHECKING OUT, KICKING BACK

I have tried to show how the distribution of the *Georgics*’ labour pattern shifts until it ends on a ‘civilised’ high note. The poem starts low and slow, counselling us at the level of iron-age tribulation. Second person must work the land while first person yelps instructions at him on how to do it, or sometimes claims we are all doing it together. Occasionally, we have a day off (book 2); until we see that the labour force we presumed unified in fact forks into a cushy quasi-custodial class of big estate owners, and down below them the little-guy *pastores* using their fingernails as last resort weapons in ‘the war on *terra*’¹³⁸ (book 3). Such a schism prepares us for the relationships of exploitation which are dolloped with honey in book 4. In the land of leisure lounge Virgil, Maecenas, the beekeeper, us readers, Aristaeus; we are granted

¹³³ Cf. the horse-trainers of book 3.129, also *uolentes*, or the *uolentia rura* of the blessed farmer in 2.500; and the negative volition of Jupiter at 1.122: *haud facilem esse uiam uoluit*.

¹³⁴ As Morgan 1999: 215 points out, *carmina pastorum* could entail both *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.

¹³⁵ Could we also interpret *Parthenope* as a wet nurse slave here (Leigh’s (2016: 430) hint)?

¹³⁶ See Thibodeau 2011: 4.

¹³⁷ On Virgil’s leisure vs. the labour of the poem’s *agricolae* here, see Volk 2002: 150-1; for poetry kept afloat on the fat of the land, cf. Thibodeau 2011: 33. For Virgil’s considerable wealth, see Thibodeau 2011: 245-7.

¹³⁸ Armstrong 2014’s irresistible pun, used of ‘insurgent weeds’.

light work, or no work, or merely that of our viewing pleasure, if we can call that work. On the other side of the picket – mostly performing their duties silently and ‘happily’, but sometimes snapping back into resistance – are the third person workers who make it all happen: the bees, the random *ipse* ‘someone else’, the resettled *senex*, the Egyptians, Cyrene, Proteus, and the unseen subjects behind *aspiciunt* whose names and faces must melt forever into the fancy magic trick which they are cuffed to focalise into the limelight. The leisure of the former rests easy on the hard work of the latter. You may redistribute your optimism and pessimism accordingly.

University of St Andrews

tag8@st-andrews.ac.uk

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